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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of school attendance on the grade point averages (GPAs) of 70 regular education and 17 learning disabled fifth-graders in a rural school district. It found that school attendance had a significant positive influence on the regular education and learning disabled students' GPAs, indicating that absenteeism directly affects the amount of learning at the elementary school level. The study also found that specific learning disabled students' GPAs were significantly lower than the GPAs of regular education students. No significant difference was found in the rate of absence between specific learning disabled students and regular education students. (MDM)

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Running head: ATTENDANCE EFFECTS ON GRADE POINT AVERAGES

School Attendance and Grade Point Averages of Regular Education and Learning Disabled Students in Elementary Schools.

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Abstract

School attendance is an integral part of a child's success in school. The purpose of this study was to show evidence of the effect school attendance has on grade point averages for regular education and learning disabled students in elementary schools. The sample consisted of 87 students (42 males and 45 females) from the fifth grade of a single rural school district. Within the sample, there were 70 regular education students and 17 learning disabled students. School records were obtained for attendance, grade point averages, gender, and type of educational placement. Results ($r = -.33$, $p <= .01$) indicated a significant effect of attendance on grade point averages. It was concluded that high absence rates have negative effects on academic achievement.

School Attendance and Grade Point Averages of Regular Education and Learning Disabled Students in Elementary Schools.

School attendance is an integral part of a child's success in school. The rate at which children are absent from school has continued to rise from 1979 when it was 8% nationally (Bamber, 1979) to 10% in 1994 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994). This increasing rate of absenteeism has had its effect on academic achievement of students in our schools. Academic achievement can be described in terms of grade point averages. If children are not in school they don't learn. When they don't learn, their chances for academic achievement are severely jeopardized. Thus, when children are frequently absent their grade point averages reflect this behavior. When we look at the specific learning disabled students versus what we would consider the "typical" regular education student this outcome is even more intensified.

Research has found average daily attendance to be positively related to achievement (Brodbelt, 1985). It is often assumed that students who are persistently absent from school become at risk for failure to obtain desirable academic achievement levels. Galloway (1985) found a positive relationship between average scores and attendance. Research has shown that many principals and teachers consider absenteeism to be a significant and complex problem (Brodbelt, 1985). In 1979, The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) found that 43% of more than 1,600 respondents to a survey considered pupil absenteeism either a "serious" problem or "a problem" (American Association of School Administrators, 1979). Attendance problems such as; truancy, cutting class, and tardiness are costly national education problems (Bullara, 1993).

In this study, we attempted to show how school attendance has significant effects on regular education and learning disabled students' grade point averages. School attendance can best be defined as a student's physical presence at school (Dejnozka and Kapel, 1991). A dictionary

definition of grade point average describes it as the average obtained by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number of credits attempted (Webster, 1988).

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of 87 students (42 males and 45 females) from the fifth grade of a single rural school district. Within the sample, there were 70 regular education students and 17 special education students, labeled specific learning disabled. The entire fifth grade population of this school district was chosen to assure an ample sample size for this study. Permission from the school district was secured prior to collection of data.

Measures

We collected computer printouts of attendance and academic records of these students from the guidance office. Gender was labeled on the records, but type of education (regular or learning disabled) was marked by the assistance of a fifth grade teacher. Collected data on attendance and grade point averages were conducted by professionals, thus their reliability and validity measures must be assumed to be high.

Procedure

Collected data from computer printouts were transferred onto tally sheets, where gender and type of education were given a representative number for statistical purposes. Attendance was recorded as a total of whole or half days absent from school. Grade point averages were computed for the cumulative fifth grade school year only and rounded to the nearest hundredth.

Results

The hypothesis as previously stated was school attendance has significant effects on regular education and learning disabled students' grade point averages.

Results of hypothesis (r = - .33, p < = .01) indicate a significant effect of attendance on grade point averages. Grade point averages of regular education students (M = 3.15, SD = .597) and learning disabled students (M = 2.18, SD = .785), showed a significant difference between the groups, t (85) = 5.62, p < .001. Difference in attendance between the regular education students (M = 6.32, SD= 5.63) and the learning disabled students (M =7.44, SD = 5.96) showed no significant difference, t (85) = - .73, p < .468.

Discussion

This study provided a number of results. First and foremost, we have demonstrated evidence of the significant effect attendance has on grade point averages (r = - .33, p < = .01). Therefore, the results of this study support the original hypothesis: School attendance has significant effects on regular education and learning disabled students' grade point averages. Our findings are consistent with others of American Association of School Administrators (1979), Bamber (1979), Brodbelt (1985), Galloway (1985), Bullara et al. (1993). We did anticipate higher correlation coefficients, but still there is evidence that as the rate of absenteeism increases, the level of grade point averages decreases. This supports the idea that absence has a negative effect on achievement at the elementary, as well as the secondary level (Brodbelt, 1985).

In addition, this study confirmed our expectations that specific learning disabled students grade point averages (M = 2.18, SD = .785) are significantly different than regular education students (M = 3.15, SD = .597), t (85) = 5.62, p < .001. However, no difference was found with rate of absence between specific learning disabled students (M = 7.44, SD = 5.96) and regular education students (M = 6.32, SD = 5.63), t (85) = - .73, p < .468.

Brodbelt (1985) suggests the basic ingredient of learning is the availability of the learner. Encouraging pupil presence is the first step in any model for learning, and must be followed by an effective school program based on a well-managed classroom learning environment where the

time-on-task is high and serious discipline problems low. Brodbelt goes on to tell us that the solution to the problem of absenteeism must address five factors; the nature of the students, the role of the parents, principal leadership, teacher quality and attitude, and supportive school personnel. Since this study was conducted with only subjects from a rural educational setting, results cannot be generalized to all school populations. However, absenteeism is a primary problem of inner-city schools and some poor rural areas where a significant number of students are absent 20% or more of the school year (Brodbelt, 1985). Absenteeism directly effects the amount of learning at the elementary level.

Developing incentives to improve attendance would be a desirable contribution to the improved education of today's youth. Future studies could look at sampling a more representative population, including a larger sample size, in order to possibly develop a stronger correlation coefficient between the two variables.

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